

An upstream view from Little Bear Creek along the section of land owned by Troy residents Jim and Zoe Cooley. The couple provided the Palouse Land Trust with a conservation easement to protect their 99 acres of property from development.

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Couple grants nearly 100 acres to Palouse Land Trust

Land includes important stretch of West Fork of Little Bear Creek

By Terri Harber
Daily News staff writer

A Latah County couple has granted the Palouse Land Trust a 99-acre conservation easement, which includes a nearly mile-long stretch of the West Fork of Little Bear Creek that Idaho Fish and Game considers essential to spawning steelhead trout.

The land, which is owned by Jim and Zoe Cooley, is located southeast of Troy and well off of Highway 99. Water flows through the area toward Kendrick virtually throughout the

entire year there and it's considered an important section of the creek because of that consistent flow and its good riparian conditions.

The Cooleys have been working with state wildlife officials for years as the agency studied the location, which is adjacent to a previous railroad right-of-way now owned by Latah County.

The couple moved there from Moscow in the late 1970s, and they say they want to see their property remain a hospitable home for wildlife.

"The fish are a nice part of the wild-life on the property," said Jim Cooley,

who used to teach chemistry at the University of Idaho.

The couple said they have seen young steelhead gather in the creek, specifically in cold pools that form when the water stream stops. The fish move on once the water flow resumes.

"Moose, bears, chipmunks, pack rats, gophers, bats, insects, snakes, toads and the list goes on," Jim explained. All have "provided us with

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an environment we learned and continue to cope with and enjoy."

The couple has used the steep and multifaceted property for growing forest products, particularly timber, gardening and livestock, though now they only have chickens. Preserving flora and fauna on the land is something the couple also want to see occur, Zoe Cooley said.

"We've always followed best practices, such as not logging next to the creek," she said. "We haven't disturbed that area."

The Cooleys will continue to own and use the property under the agreement. Their heirs could maintain or sell the property but must agree only to uses that would "preserve special natu-

ral values of the property," Palouse Land Trust Executive Director Amy Trujillo said.

Most important to the couple is that the land not be subdivided, Jim Cooley said.

"I believe this provision will make it unattractive for a developer to become an owner," he said.

The Cooleys are both in their 80s, and any future owners of the land would work with the Palouse Land Trust to ensure the property sustains its characteristics and ability to support wildlife, Trujillo said.

The couple also deeded land to the county and Latah Trail Foundation so the Latah Trail would reach their property, but the stretch hasn't yet been paved.

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